FRONTLINE

Catholics in America:
Is Nothing Sacred?

FRONTLINE #316

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Is Nothing Sacred?

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Introduction

ANNOUNCER
Tonight on FRONTLINE...the Catholic Church...locked in a struggle for power...a struggle for faith.

KATHY VANDENBERG
I have to ask myself, "Why do I stay with the Catholic Church?"

FATHER STEVE SCHERER
Rome I think is--is trying to grab power again.

JOANNE KUFFEL
We are loyal to His Holiness, Pope John Paul the Second and we lament what has happened in this country.

ANNOUNCER
Tonight, a report on the conflict between the Pope in Rome and "Catholics in America: Is Nothing Sacred?"

JUDY WOODRUFF
Good evening.

"Is nothing sacred?" That's a familiar phrase which has taken on a new and deeper meaning for American Catholics--ever since the controversial Second Vatican Council ended 20 years ago.

The Vatican Council promised to open the Church to new ideas and change. But that was the last thing many Catholics wanted. And the conflict that resulted turned the Church inside out, dividing Catholics, especially Catholics in the United States.

What does it mean to be both Catholic and American, to try to be faithful to the authoritarian traditions of the Church, while living in a democratic society?

Once, Catholics seemed to speak with one voice. Now, the oldest, biggest church in the world finds there are many Catholic voices as producer Irv Drasnin reports in his film on Catholics in America.

SCHOOL CHILDREN
I thank you dear God with all my heart that I am a Catholic, a member of the only true faith.

IRV DRASNIN
For members of the "only true faith," this is a rite of passage.

These third-graders are preparing for first communion, the most sacred expression of a faith held by more than 50 million American Catholics.

SCHOOL CHILDREN
I promise to keep faithfully all of the commandments of God, and the laws of the Church. With your help, I shall live and die a good Catholic.

IRV DRASNIN
What it means to "live and die a good Catholic" has been argued and questioned for almost 2,000 years. Traditionally, the answers have been found here, in Rome. In all that time, whether threatened by outsiders with persecution and war, or from within by heresy and schism, the Church has survived--standing as a fortress on the rock where the first Pope, Peter, received the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

The way to heaven, life everlasting: that's the spiritual power of the Church, based on scripture, divine revelation and ritual.

And, on the supreme authority of the Bishop of Rome, the successor to St. Peter who speaks for God on earth: the Pope.

On matters of doctrine, discipline and moral teachings, the Pope reigns over the Western world's oldest institutional bureaucracy, a power structure that's remained unmoved since the Middle Ages: the hierarchy of Cardinals, to archbishops and bishops, and through them to the clergy and below, to the laity, the people. That power has been challenged in the past, and again in the past 20 years since the Second Vatican Council--Vatican II--called by some the most important religious event of this century.

The purpose of Vatican II: to change a church that had resisted change for hundreds of years, to bring an ancient church into the modern world.

The power of the Roman Catholic Church is embodied in the Pope. To be Catholic has meant to accept his absolute authority.

Intentionally or not, the central issue of Vatican II became one of authority: whether power would be shared in a more democratic Church, whose policies could change, or whether a conservative hierarchy could defend its privileged position.

It may not always be apparent here, in St. Peter's, but the call to reform the Church started a revolution within the Church: a struggle for power that became, as well, a struggle for faith.

SILVIO CARDINAL ODDI
The practice of Catholicism is diminishing. A lot of people, they are no more going to attend mass on Sunday. A lot of people don't confess anymore. A lot of people they are very easily going against the law of the Church. That's happened not only in the States, but has happened throughout, practically all the world.

IRV DRASNIN
To the guardians of the faith, like the 74-year-old Silvio Cardinal Oddi--head of the Catholic clergy--the Church is in danger of losing one of its most prized possessions: unity.

SILVIO CARDINAL ODDI
And that is the reason, because the Church insists, the Holy Father insists on any occasion--particularly when he's traveling throughout the world--he's insisting, insisting that the Catholics should obey to the Church, go to mass on Sunday, go to confession, should receive the sacraments, should in their private life, should obey the law of the Church and love of God. But you see, we are just preaching for that, we are just working for that, and we hope that the future will be better.

IRV DRASNIN
The light that is Christ still burns deep within the heart and soul of the faithful.

But 20 years after Vatican II promised to open the Church to new ideas, there's confusion and turmoil.

The Church that 350 years ago condemned Galileo for saying the sun, not the earth, is at the center of the universe, is still considering the case.

The Church that earlier in this century condemned "modernism" as heresy, has yet to fully accept it.

The message still carried from here to the world's more than 800 million Catholics still bears the aura of Papal infallibility, a message no longer universally welcomed or followed.

RADIO VOICES (Singing)
Oooooh, Rock of Ages...

RADIO VOICE (Talking)
Oh Lord, be my rock of strength. You are my rock. For your name's sake, you will lead and guide me. Pastoral Productions proudly presents "Rock of Ages," with Father Joe Jagodensky, sponsored by the archdioceses of Milwaukee through the cooperation of WKTI-FM.

FATHER JOE JAGODENSKY
The Lord is my constant companion. There is no need that he cannot fulfill...

IRV DRASNIN
The gospel message may be universal, but in America, the confrontation between modern world and the traditional Church was unavoidable. That's true in Milwaukee, heartland of America; heartland of the Church in America. Today, 20 years after Vatican II, the Church in America is in that most painful of periods: a period of transition. Many have lost the faith. Others have found it, in new ways.

No longer is Catholicism in America described in terms of conformity. No longer is the Church strictly a pyramid of authority. For increasing numbers, it's become a circle of equality: what Vatican II called "the people of God."

Twenty years ago, this might have been mistaken for a meeting of Protestant holy rollers, not Catholic charismatics, speaking in tongues.

CATHOLIC CHARISMATICS

Woman #1: Hallelujah, hallelujah Jesus. Thank you Lord. Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus. Oh Lord, we praise you Jesus. We praise you Lord. Hallelujah.

Woman #2: Jesus, Jesus, Lord.

CHURCH CONGREGATION (SINGING)

If God is for us, who can be against?

IRV DRASNIN
Almost one in every four Americans in a Catholic. Many have accepted change in the practice of their faith, but many others are troubled by what they feel is a loss of meaning, of mystery.

Perhaps more than any other, this was a church of immigrants, which embraced American ideals while holding onto a tradition that sprang from old world ideas.

During the first half of this century, nowhere were Catholics more loyal to the Pope, more obedient to Rome, than were Catholics in America.

And for Catholics in an often hostile America, the Church was more than a religion: it was a way of life.

That sense of community remains strong in Milwaukee, a city of immigrants that's 35 percent Catholic, a population that reflects the past times and tensions affecting Catholic life in America today.

BINGO CALLER
B-Eight. B-Eight.

IRV DRASNIN
The easy stereotypes are no longer possible and were never true, but beneath the familiar images was a Catholic culture, a belief system anchored in the teachings of the Church.

School Teacher: Who made you? Cindy. All right, God made you. Why did God make you? Genevieve.

Student #1: To go to heaven.

School Teacher: To go to heaven. All right. The very first place you think of--where's God's home?

Student #2: Up in heaven.

School Teacher: Up in heaven. All right. What is--where else is his home?

Student #2: In our hearts.

School Teacher: In our hearts. All right, how do we know that, that God is in our hearts? What do we have?

Student #2: Ummm...a soul.

School Teacher: A soul, all right. So who's our greatest leader? Gina?

Student #3: Jesus.

School Teacher: All right, Jesus. Why is Jesus our greatest Leader?

IRV DRASNIN
The lessons of the old catechism haven't been entirely forgotten in this parish school, not yet.

Irv Drasnin: Is what you're teaching in religion class here typical of what is taught in Milwaukee's Catholic schools?

School Teacher: Sorry to say, but no. I think our Lady Queen of Peace school upholds the magesterium of the church. And we teach exactly what comes from Rome. You go through the church with the sacraments and plus we have the Pope, who is Christ on earth, and that is something that we have to follow. It's a blind obedience and at times you often ask, "Why" Why do I have to do that--question authority?" It's not for us to question.

IRV DRASNIN
Not to question but to keep the faith has from earliest times been a purpose of the pilgrimage. So it is for this band of travelers, who've come 5,000 miles from Milwaukee.

They are moved by the power of piety, and by their concern for what's

IRV DRASNIN (continued)
happening to the Church in America. That's what's brought them here, to the Vatican. They are modern pilgrims with some old ideas about the fundamentals of the faith, about what it means to walk in the footsteps of Christ.

MONSIGNOR ALPHONSE POPEK (SERMON)
Here we are in this venerable and great cathedral, reaffirming our faith in the angels, God's created beings, these great intelligences and powers whom we call *angeli*, from the Greek word *angelos*, which means "messenger."

IRV DRASNIN
The message brought by a 70-year-old Milwaukee priest--Monsignor Alphonse Popek--to this chapel in St. Peter's basilica, is a pledge of allegiance to the hierarchy. He and his followers, including Joanne Kuffel, are members of Catholics United for the Faith, CUF. Their voice in America is small, but it is heard in the Vatican.

MONSIGNOR ALPHONSE POPEK (SERMON)
And when we think of this spot, so close as we are to the Holy Father, we could think of him as the messenger of the Gospel. He is the messenger of the Lord in our times. Someday we shall call him Pope John Paul the Magnificent, because of his work in solidifying the faith. He has gone to the roots of the Church, to the people, so that if any of them have been misled, they might be brought back to the faith.

Irv Drasnin: If you were to speak about the Church in America to a cardinal of the Church in Rome, what would you say to him?

Joanne Kuffel: I would say, "Your Eminence, I come here with a heart full of sadness. There are many of us in the United States who love and defend the teachings of the Church. We are loyal to His Holiness, Pope John Paul the Second, and we lament what has happened in our country. We find our good orders of nuns in shambles. We find our priests--the vocations are down; not lost but down because of our seminaries. We find that our people are confused, hurt and upset."

MONSIGNOR ALPHONSE POPEK
What I fear is that we already have in the United States the "American Catholic Church," and it is certainly not to be confused with the Roman Catholic Church. I fear that we're already in schism. It may not be accepted as such. But the point that must be made is that a Roman Catholic is one who is obedient to, is subservient to the magesterium of the Church, the faith and the morals as it was taught, as it is being taught, as it always will be taught.

Male Sex Education Teacher: Listen up! Listen up!

Female Sex Education Teacher: The first clue is "expandable."

IRV DRASNIN
What's being taught on a Saturday afternoon in this classroom is, as much as anything, what's dividing American Catholics and testing the teachings of the Church.

Female Sex Education Teacher: OK ready? Anyone else? Second clue: "female organ." OK, is everyone...got one group...Do we need another clue? OK, you were the first up. All right, let's hear your answer.

Student Group #1: Vagina.

Female Sex Education Teacher: OK, vagina...

Student Group #2: Vagina. Uterus.

Female Sex Education Teacher: OK, that's cool...

Student Group #3: Vagina.

Female Sex Education Teacher: All right, "vagina" is the correct answer.

Student Groups: (applause)

Second Female Sex Education Teacher: This is a side view, showing...

IRV DRASNIN
This voluntary sex education program sponsored by the Milwaukee Archdiocese, conducted by parents for eighth-and ninth-graders, is called VYS: Value Your Sexuality.

In style and in substance, VYS offends some Catholics--especially members of CUF, who've sent this program to Rome for review. But to many others, VYS represents an effort to bring their children, and their Church, into the modern world--the purpose of Vatican II--a world in which the facts of life seem more complex than the simpler, age-old rules of the Church.

During this weekend program, Catholic parents must confront a wide range of questions on the minds of their children, and of the Church.

Parent #1: Again the question was, "Is it ok to use birth control?" "Is it a sin to have sexual intercourse before marriage?"..."Should gay people be denied certain rights?"...

Parent #2: "What have some of your parents told you about masturbation?"...

Parent #3: "Do you know how the Church feels about abortion?"...

Parent #4: "Are there any cases where you think abortion is acceptable?

Parent #1: "We've got two types of questions we know, from the "question box." One is fact questions, and one is moral discussion questions. And this is what we would call a moral opinion. And so we would like to discuss this question: "Is it immoral to get pregnant when you are not married?"

IRV DRASNIN
Once, there were only fact--not opinion--questions, and the answers were clearly defined. Now, even the Church's most basic moral teachings are up for discussion and to the individual conscience.

Parent #2: The question is: "Is it ok to use birth control?"

Parent #3: It's an opinion. It's an opinion question. And some of you may say, "yes," and some of you may feel, "no." There's no right or no wrong.

Parent #2: What I've given you is, like, some definitions of birth control, some questions that people considering birth control have to consider, and then what the Church says about birth control. Consider the types, consider the questions involving the reasons behind birth control. And then go according to your conscience, and accept responsibility for your own decision. So we go back to this question: "Is it okay to use birth control?" Now what's your answer?

IRV DRASNIN
Since Vatican II as never before, the question has arisen: When to follow Church teachings, or conscience. That's certainly true for these Catholics.

FATHER STEVE SCHERER
We begin our prayer this evening in the name of God our Creator, Redeemer, and the Spirit of Love within us all.

IRV DRASNIN
Dignity is a national organization of gay Catholics that challenges both the established thinking and the sensitivities of the Church, in Rome and in America.

It's a controversial voice, yet it may be speaking to the concerns of many Catholics.

FATHER STEVE SCHERER (celebrating Mass)
If our faith is not something we can celebrate, and something we can share with one another because it's something that's important to us, is it worth having at all? And sure we'd like the big miracles to happen. But I think the miracle that is happening in our midst is the fact that we can gather to celebrate--the miracle that we can be here to support one another, with love, in Dignity. We're not letting people walk all over us. We're not trying to fall into traps. And that'a a source of hope for us.

Irv Drasnin: Is it a risk for you to celebrate this mass?

Father Steve Scherer: Yes. There's the hate mail that comes in regularly. I've been rather open in speaking about my involvement with Dignity. Many people have respected me for it. Many people--once I get to talk to them on a one-to-one level--recognize the fact that it is something good that is being done. Others say, "How can you do this horrible thing? You're with sinners." And my comment for them is, "We're all sinners."

IRV DRASNIN
Father Steve Scherer, class of 1979, is a graduate of Milwaukee's St. Francis Seminary. Like a great many priests in recent years, he's caught between the Vatican II idea of a people's Church and the tradition of the Church.

Father Steve Scherer: Rome, I think, is trying to grab power again. Perhaps it feels it's lost power since the Second Vatican Council.

Irv Drasnin: As a priest, do you feel that you have to look over your shoulder at Rome, that they're watching?

Scherer: I guess I do feel they are. It has a certain amount of fear associated with it. I like priesthood very much. I feel I'm doing a very good job as a priest. I'm able to touch a lot of people's lives, and, I think, by my ministry, make people realize that the Church is more than just a lot--just a set of rules, and just a big power of authority figure that sits over in Rome in the Vatican, and think up rules all day that people have to follow.

Drasnin: Who do you have to fear?

Scherer: The CUF people are a big influence. I've been verbally attacked by them. I've been attacked in writing by them. I was told that my name was sent to Rome. And when I thought--oh, my gosh, what have I done so badly that my name has gone to Rome for?

Drasnin: Sent to Rome by members of CUF?

Scherer: Members of CUF.

JOANNE KUFFEL
If the clergy, and naturally if Lucifer, Satan, whatever you wish to call him, wishes to get again at the Church, they're going to go through, shall we say, the quote, "the educated ones." And so it would be our priests, our nuns, whom we would normally trust. And if they're trained incorrectly in the seminaries, in the convents, then it is the ordinary layman, the laity, who will save the Church, because basically they will have kept the faith.

IRV DRASNIN
Members of CUF, like Milwaukee's Joanne Kuffel, regularly inform the Vatican about those in America they think are not keeping the faith.

JOANNE KUFFEL
If Rome has spoken, that is the answer. When the holy Father gives these directives, whether they're *ex cathedra*, which means they must be believed, or just in his simple elocutions, what separates us? We have but one pope. And we do not have fifteen, twenty popes in our various parishes. There is but one pope. And so through all this turbulent time, you must remain in that piece of the bark where Peter is.

IRV DRASNIN
In one way, Pope John Paul II himself is a symbol of change: the first non-Italian Pope in almost 500 years, a Polish priest who's captured the world's attention with his travels and style.

If for many in the crowd he's become more a personality than an authority figure, that's not true for members of CUF, or for members of the clergy, like Monsignor Popek. For them, the pilgrimage is an act of devotion.

But for other Catholics, especially Americans, this Pope has increasingly become a center of controversy.

Many, in and out of the clergy, believe he's come to represent resistance to the spirit if not the letter of Vatican II, an attempt to return to the authoritarian ways of the old Church.

Every Wednesday he's in Rome, the Pope extends to a general audience his blessing, and a lecture on one of the tenets of the faith.

POPE JOHN PAUL II
Dear brothers and sisters. We are considering today the spiritual life of married couples, taking as our point of departure the teaching contained in *Humanae Vitae*.

IRV DRASNIN
The subject is Humanae Vitae--human life--the Church's teaching against artificial contraception. But the issue is authority.

After Vatican II, it was widely expected that the Church would change its position on birth control. Instead, against the overwhelming recommendation of a Papal commission, in 1968 it was reaffirmed. Pope John Paul II has reaffirmed it again, and again.

This Church teaching may have caused the most serious crisis for Papal authority since Luther and the Protestant Reformation.

No issue has so tested the faith of American Catholics. And in America, no Papal teaching has been so widely disobeyed.

SILVIO CARDINAL ODDI
I remember when Pope Paul the Sixth, when he was so attacked, really, for this Humanae Vitae. He said, "Yes, I know that many, many, many Catholics they are practicing the birth control. But in that sense we cannot approve because they are doing this; the principle is that we can't go against the life. We are not the master of the life. The life exists. We must respect the life." So the birth control is certainly a bad thing--even if a lot of people who are Catholics are doing it. And I can add that we are the most reasonable men. When a person comes to confess to me, he say "I have ten abortion," I tell him, "Don't start again." I will not put in prison, I will not punish him. We say, "Don't start. Stop it." What can we do? It's difficult, I understand. It's very difficult.

IRV DRASNIN
That's one of the difficult issues for young Catholics, who must decide what to do, at a time when Catholic universities like Marquette, in Milwaukee, have become more open to diverse theological views.

DAN MAGUIRE (IN CLASSROOM)
There was a time 30 years ago, when there were no conservative Catholics or liberal Catholics; there were just Catholics. We were a monolith, and we simply all believed just about the same thing from birth control to bingo. We were just all into the same type of belief system, and now obviously that isn't the case. And so you're growing up in a world where that hasn't been the case. You're post-Vatican II babies. And so you grew up in a world where there have been, you've seen bishops have disagreed with one another, and Popes have corrected previous Popes, and theologians are classified now as more liberal, conservative, etc. And the question I'd like to hear a little feedback on is: What does it mean to you to be Catholic?

Irv Drasnin: What was the affect of Humanae Vitae on Catholics in America?

Dan Maguire: I think it was the strong realization that the Church can make a mistake. And we were very naive in this country. We were very obedient-type Catholics. There was a strong conviction that grew up in the 60s that the Church was wrong on birth control; that this was an import from some other vision of life. And there was every reason to believe that the Vatican would even recognize that. When they didn't do it, I think practice then separated and people began to act on their own consciences. The use of the confessional changed. And I think a number of people felt if they could blow this one, they could blow a lot of things. And so there was a certain disenchantment, profound disenchantment, that came into the Church with the Humanae Vitae.

IRV DRASNIN
Maguire was a priest for fifteen years. He and his wife Marjorie, also a theologian, are perhaps most controversial for their view that pro-choice on abortion is a legitimate Catholic position in open conflict with the teaching authority of the Church.

Irv Drasnin: As Catholics, as moral theologians, aren't you required to follow and obey the teachings of the Church?

Dan Maguire: Yes, we are, but that's a very ambiguous term. The teaching of the Church is kind of like a greased pig that runs through a lot of conversation these days, as though it were as simply determined as the rules of the National Football League, saying, "there are only ten yards to make a first down. That's what you need."

Marjorie Maguire: And you know, you don't even have to be new-fangled, liberal Catholics who are theologians to know this. You can go back to the catechism we all learned as children that told us that we only had to take as absolutely true any dogmas that the Pope proclaimed as infallible. Well most of the things the Pope says, he does not proclaim as infallible. So, that means if he's not infallible, he's fallible. That means he can be wrong. So it means somebody has the obligation in the interests of the Church, to try to point out where they see he's wrong. And that's what we feel we have to do.

Drasnin: What about this Pope, John Paul II? Does he represent the thinking of most American Catholics?

Dan Maguire: No. I think this Pope is extraordinary in his criticisms of capitalism and communism, and saying a pox on both those houses because neither one of them really take care of the poor and the weak. I think his sense of that, in general, has been very good.

Dan Maguire (continued): But then on other issues, he's very inconsistent. He's the most politically active Pope in recent memory, and yet he doesn't want other politicians to get involved. I think he has aided and abetted those who are trying to really wage a counter-attack on the Second Vatican Council. And on what I've been calling the pelvic issues, I think he's antiquarian on that.

Drasnin: What are the pelvic issues?

Dan Maguire: Oh, the issues like birth control, abortion, sterilization, sexual ethics, homosexuality. He brings an enormous rigidity to those issues, and he can't get off those issues. I mean, he's constantly re-asserting them, even though as a matter of fact in the Catholic Church you have pluralism on all those issues. No one views it in the simplistic terms that the Pope does. Not no one, but most theologians are not in that simplistic mode.

The big news is that the Catholic Church is not monolithic. It is diverse and pluralistic. It also is important to note that obedience is not a gospel ideal. It is a Vatican ideal, but it's not a gospel ideal. You just have to search those gospels forever and you'll still never find: "By this will they know that you're my disciples that you obey one another." It's just not there.

Irv Drasnin: Is there room for the views of moral theologians like Dan Maguire at Marquette in the Church in America?

Monsignor Alphonse Popek: If, by the Church of America, you mean the American Catholic Church, there is much room for him. He could be a shining luminary in that Church, he and his wife. There'd be much room. But in the Roman Catholic Church, the Church founded by Christ, there should be no room for him. Oh, we can pray for his soul, we can ask that the chasm be closed. But will it be closed?

IRV DRASNIN
No part of the Church has been more obedient than women religious. This traditional picture of convent life survives in Milwaukee, but barely.

Since Vatican II, one-third--60,000--American sisters and nuns have left their orders, and of those who remain half are more that 60 years old. It's a rejection of the past and a challenge to the future of the Church. At the convent today, signs of change can be seen, and heard.

SISTER BETTY WOLCOTT
I think the big failure was that while we may have spoken, in some instances, a sort of prophetic word to society, that our big failure has been that we have not done that to the Church. And while we may have tried to be sensitive to the needs of the poor, we have not created a

SISTER BETTY WOLCOTT (continued)
a church in solidarity with the poor. And while we may be for liberating people from oppression and from all of the things that keep them from being fully human, we haven't created that kind of church.

IRV DRASNIN
No group responded more dramatically to the changes of Vatican II then the women of the Church. Sister Betty Wolcott joined her order 40 years ago. She's kept her vows but broken with tradition--in defiance of what the Pope might think.

Sister Betty Wolcott: Well, I think he thinks we're far too liberal; that we are not obedient little people who should be doing certain "churchy works," works that he considers more appropriate to us. It's difficult. I don't spend a lot of time reflecting on the Holy Father. It's not a big deal for me, really, because I feel that the Church--I can't wait for the institutional church. Things--I'd never get anything done If I did that.

Irv Drasnin: But one recent Vatican guideline says that women religious should return to wearing religious dress and living in religious houses.

Wolcott: Well, of course, if you put out things like that, guidelines like that, you're asking for non-compliance. I mean that's not how we see our--that's not a real value in our life.

Drasnin: How do you think the views that I hear you expressing would be received in the Vatican?

Wolcott: Well, I've written my letters to the Vatican. I mean, I feel that we need to challenge the Vatican if the Vatican needs to be challenged. I mean it is not--it's a human institution.

Drasnin: Does it need to be challenged?

Wolcott: Oh, yes, indeed it does.

Mary Ann IHM: I'm saddened by the kind of crack-downs that are coming out of the Vatican, crack-downs on religious orders, and trying to push them back into wearing the habit and some old forms of governance and so on, that they've moved beyond at the invitation of Rome at the time of the Vatican Council.

Drasnin: Will that kind of thing be accepted, do you think, in America, that kind of crack-down by Rome?

IHM: According to the women that I'm in dialogue with in religious orders and the lay women who support--who are working together--we hopefully will not let that happen; that we will stand in solidarity and oppose that kind of intimidation and terrorism. It just is not Christian, it's not gospel, it's immoral.

IRV DRASNIN
Mary Ann Ihm was a sister for 25 years. She's left her order but not the Church.

Mary Ann Ihm: We're not doing it to be schismatic. We're not doing it to be disobedient. We're genuinely, authentically, trying to find expression to our Christian faith. And we are church. We are "woman church," that other half that has not been heard from for 2,000 years.

Irv Drasnin: What would you say to a woman who says that she feels unequal in the Church?

Monsignor Alphonse Popek: All I have to say is, when God created man he created him first. I mean, that's the priority. I can't, nor can you, nor can anyone change that priority.

Drasnin: But what some women are talking about is wanting to be ordained as priests.

Popek: Oh you're, oh, well, the ordination to the priesthood--we'll have to hold back on that.

FEMALE SEMINARY STUDENT
So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and, while he slept, took one of his ribs, and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman, and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called "woman," because she was taken out of man.

IRV DRASNIN
The place and role of women is an issue not only in the convent but here, in the seminary, where women have been traditionally excluded and where the Vatican believes they should be excluded again. For now, women can study here but some--like Kathy Vandenberg, married and the mother of two--want more: to be what the Vatican says no woman can ever be, a priest.

Kathy Vandenber: I don't think God cares whether we're male or female. I think we're all equal in the sight of God. I see no problem with it.

Irv Drasnin: What does it mean to be a Catholic today in America?

Vandenberg: I ask myself, "What does that mean to be a Roman Catholic woman?" You know, I don't know what that means. I really don't know. I have to ask myself, "Why do I stay within the Catholic Church? Why do I continue to bump heads? Why do I continue to be in a Church that often times says, "I don't want you, Kathy."

Vandenberg (continued): Because if they really wanted me, they would welcome me with open arms.

Drasnin: What do your husband and children think about your wanting to be ordained a priest?

Vandenberg: It's not easy for them. Sometimes my children have been harassed. They say, "I saw your mother on T.V. when you were at the cathedral, at that prayer service outside the ordinations." And they say, "Mom, I wish you wouldn't do that." But I say to them, "I have to do it. I have to do it for you. I have to do it for my grandchildren. Because if we don't do something positive, things will never change." It's not easy. It's not easy for them, and it's not easy for me. I'm alone sometimes.

Drasnin: Do you take a risk speaking out this way?

Vandenberg: Yes. I was, I had to ask in my heart whether or not I was even going to talk to you. Because after you--you go back to New York or Boston, I'm still here. I don't know what people are going to say. But I know I have to do something, and I'm continuing to talk on out and say, "It has to stop. It has to stop. Sexism has to stop."

IRV DRASNIN
The Pope says the ferment has to stop, and has ordered investigations of American seminaries and religious orders.

The Vatican is alarmed by the diminishing numbers of priests and nuns, by what it sees as the erosion of discipline, as the challenge to its authority.

At Milwaukee's seminary, as throughout the country, enrollments are in serious and steady decline. One of the major reasons is mandatory celibacy, a vow that many priests believe should at least be optional.

In the past 20 years, more than 10,000 American priests have married, have renounced Church law that makes celibacy a requirement of the priesthood--among them, Jim Groppi, a graduate of Milwaukee's seminary who, after eighteen years a priest, became a bus driver.

JIM GROPPI
I know too many married men that would make better priests than single men, than to tell me categorically that in order to be effective you must be a single male. Christ never thought that way. Eleven of the twelve Apostles were married. I mean if St. Peter were alive today and to present himself for ordination to the Church they would tell him, "We can't use you. You've got a wife."

IRV DRASNIN
For Groppi, now president of his union local, the Vatican is to blame for the gap between Catholic teaching and Catholic practice.

JIM GROPPI
Because there is a superabundance of laws, people are sinning, because they think they're violating the laws and yet they can't live in accordance with them. And that's what has happened in the Church. It has been here for 2,000 years and apparently some of the single male canon lawyers in the Vatican had nothing to do but to create more and more laws. And those laws are bad. They make people sin, and they're hardly Christian.

IRV DRASNIN
As a priest, Jim Groppi fought secular authority during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Today, he's still fighting authority, in the bus company and in the Church.

Jim Groppi: But also, the other fact is the question of authoritarianism, especially in America. We are not good at accepting authoritarianism. We insist on participation, participating in the decision-making. We're taught that from our earliest years and when the Church tells us, "No, we can't exercise those rights in the city of God but we can exercise them in the secular city," one begins to scratch their head and we say, "well, there's something good in the secular city that is not good in the city of God, and maybe the city of God ought to be changed."

Irv Drasnin: Do you think there's anyone in the Vatican who would share your views?

Groppi: No. I don't know of anyone who would. But I believe in it. I've always believed in democracy. And I believe that God speaks--see the Church--God speaks not only through the clergy, through the authoritarian structure, he speaks through the people. And the people's voice is not able to be heard because of the aurhoritarian structure of the Church.

AMERICAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE (Bishops singing)
All creatures of our God and King; Lift up your voices let us sing. Oh praise him. Hallelujah...

IRV DRASNIN
For the Church in America, this is the center of authority, the American bishops--successors to the apostles, the loyal followers of Jesus.

IRV DRASNIN (continued)
To the Vatican, especially the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith--once the Holy Office of the Inquisition--they haven't always been loyal enough.

In recent years, the Vatican has at least twice ordered that the actions of certain bishops be investigated, with the secret findings delivered to Rome--revealing a conflict between the Churches of Rome and America that has few parallels in modern Church history.

Bishop Walter Sullivan of Richmond: investigated by Rome, in part it's believed, for writing the preface to a book on Catholics and homosexuality.

Archbishop Raymond Huntausen of Seattle: investigated by Rome, it's believed, on matters of doctrine--and perhaps because of his active opposition to the nuclear arms race.

Jesuit Priest William Callahan was silenced for two years, on orders from Rome.

FATHER WILLIAM CALLAHAN
It's obviously a very painful thing to be silenced on areas that you feel very strongly about, as was my own case, my own ten-year advocacy of the ordination of women and of equality in the Church. But I also understand that in some sense that's a compliment, in that there is great worry developing that the views you espouse are starting to gain a real credible foothold and, therefore, the institutional Church tries to slow it down. That means that you become quite threatening.

IRV DRASNIN
The threat is a Church divided: between Rome and America, between American Catholics themselves--a threat to traditional authority, and how it's exercised.

Perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, in America, bishops are caught in the whirlwind of change, and nowhere is it being felt more strongly than in places like Milwaukee, where Rembert Weakland is archbishop.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland: Probably the hardest part of being Catholic is to keep the diversity that is possible and needed because of cultural--because of traditional historical influences, at at the same time to keep a bond of unity. So, that tension between needed diversity and unity has always been true of the Church, always will be true of the Church, and certainly now is one of the characteristics of the Church. It's going to get worse instead of better.

Irv Drasnin: Can a Bishop in America today lead and expect to be followed?

Weakland: I think so. I think so.

DRASNIN: Can a Pope lead and expect to be obeyed in America?

Weakland: I think so. There, I think, we all have to face the same question, and that is: probably the kind of authority that previously we had in the Church where you said it and people begrudgingly did it, is not with us anymore. We rely more on the intrinsic persuasiveness of the argument itself, and that causes a new kind of leadership. And to me, there has been a change in that leadership which demands more vision, more inspiration, and a different way of going about it. But the Church, like the world, the society we live in, is still looking for leaders.

Irv Drasnin: Many American Catholics, in the clergy and out of the clergy, see the Vatican putting pressure on the Church in America to be more disciplined, more orthodox, more obedient, if you will, to the doctrine and the hierarchy of the Church.

Silvio Cardinal Oddi: Yes, I agree. And again, I think it's not only with the States that we are--that the Vatican, the Holy See is using this method, because for a certain moment after Council, Vatican Council Second, it was a little bit disappointment. Everybody was thinking that they should, they would think what they like, they are not obliged to obey, they were free to do what they prefer, and it was a mistake, particularly for us, for the Catholic Church. We are a hierarchical organism, and the obedience for us is very, very very important. I would say that you can't go on without obedience because if we are permitting to everybody to act according to what he thinks we are wrong, certainly. We are no more a Catholic Church, we will be a lot of churches.

IRV DRASNIN
What's being heard are the voices of true believers who, with equal faith and conviction, no longer always believe the same things.

The Pope still commands the world's imagination, and the respect of millions of Catholics, but no longer can he command unquestioning obedience.

What may seem disobedient to some in the Church is for others a living out of their faith, an act of conscience, a belief in the spirit of Vatican II.

What's being questioned in America is a faith imported from another time, another place. Perhaps the conflict was inevitable, between the old European idea of monarchy--even a Papal monarchy--and American ideas of discussion, even dissent.

It would be untrue to report a new schism in the Roman Catholic Church; that last happened in the sixteenth century. But as the twenty-first century approaches, the split in the Church is serious, because of the power of faith.

IRV DRASNIN (Continued)
Vatican II raised the question without providing the answer: whether the power of the Church is in the Pope, the Vicar of Christ who speaks for God on earth--or whether that authority is to be shared with all Catholics, the people of God.

Udate

JUDY WOODRUFF
The power of struggle among American Catholics is also a fight for the future of the Church...that isn't likely to end soon.

The battle, which has focused on abortion, contraception, capitalism, and nuclear weapons, will next address an issue that could become the most controversial of all, as American bishops prepare a new pastoral letter--on the role of women in society and in the Church.

And the Pope, in a surprise announcement, has called ranking bishops to Rome this fall...to examine and evaluate Vatican II. Conservative Catholics hope this will be a first step in backing away from Vatican II--in order to restore discipline and unity to a Church divided.

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